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COMMON FACTORS INFLUENCE EFL INSTRUCTORS WHETHER OR NOT TO USE COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN THEIR CLASSES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Anwar Mohammed HASABALA [1]

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Abstract:

This article reviews the research literature on cooperative learning in English as foreign language in terms of the most common factors which influence EFL instructors (whether or not) to use Cooperative learning in their teaching practice. These factors often play negative or positive role due to instructors' perception towards cooperative learning. In other words these factors can be viewed both as problems and successful factors according to the believe that held by the teacher's mind. The purpose of this study is to correct the misconception of CL critiques who resist the shift from the traditional whole class method (lecture) to cooperative learning despite its scientific research base.

Key Words: Cooperative Learning Students' Achievement -English Language Proficiency.

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[1] Assistant Professor, University of Khartoum, Sudan. anwar.hassaballa@uofk.edu

INTRODUCTION:

Cooperative Learning (CL) strategy has become the most important teaching strategy in raising the proficiency of EFL learners to the desired level. In recent decades, CL has emerged as one of the major research subjects/areas due to its importance in pedagogy in general and second language (L2) research in particular.

The late of 21st century saw a shift of ELT paradigm from teacher-centered to learner-centered approach in English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts all around the world. Traditional methods of teaching started being replaced by CL methods (Slavin, 2010). Researchers recognized the importance of more student-centered teaching methodologies for better English language teaching. Teacher-centered approach of standing in front of the class for the whole lecture, talking most of the time and giving home assignment was recommended to be replaced with more student-centered approach with different strategies to make the students more creative, interactive and out-put oriented (Davoudi & Mahinpo, 2012). Cooperative learning is widely recognized as a pedagogical practice that promotes socialization and learning among students from pre-school through to tertiary level and across different subject domains. It involves students working together to achieve common goals or complete group tasks – goals and tasks that they would be unable to complete by themselves. Cooperative learning has been found to better promote students' learning and social relations rather than the more traditional whole-class methods of teaching (Cohen 1994 b; Johnson and Johnson 1989; Slavin 1995; Veenman et al. 2000). Cooperative learning has been proven to create an atmosphere of academic achievement and to be effective in classroom environments (Johnson and Johnson 1993). Education research has emphasized that when students are actively involved in cooperative activities, they tend to learn best and more of what is taught; retain it longer than conventional teaching. Extensive research has shown that cooperative learning is a more effective instructional method over competitive and individualistic approaches. Specifically, cooperative learners have demonstrated higher academic outcomes. Johnson (2000)

Many educators **teach as they were taught** and this might not be as effective for today's learners because traditional strategies require passive learning. Many educators are aware that traditional methods are not successful in turning out self-directed problem solvers. Traditional teaching methods might be failing to produce results because they simply do not engage today's learners. Cummings (2000) In other words, instructional strategies that were once effectively used in the past by educators may not be as appropriate for the learners of today, as they prepare to become the leaders of tomorrow, Gatto (1999). Thus teachers have had to refine their strategies to meet the varied needs of the many students they face each day, Jackson (2004).

This article attempt to determine the (10) common factors that might influence EFL instructors whether or not to use CL in their classrooms as follows:

1. Class noise:

Many teachers and practitioners believe that a good class is the silent class due to the old paradigm of teaching which viewed learners as empty vessels or a blank sheet and the role of teacher is to pour the wisdom or write on it. Thus class noise seem to be a problem in this respect, Slavin (1995) noted that cooperative learning might lead to increase noise in the classroom which might cause some problems in the learning process.

These EFL instructors assume that, with students interacting at once in cooperative learning the noise will escalate and their classrooms might get out of control. This assumption indicates fundamental lack of knowledge about cooperative learning. As Kagan (1994) has stated that; *"Cooperative learning requires a number of management skills that are not necessary in a traditional classroom. In the traditional classroom, students do little talking and interacting. Traditional classroom management is an extension of the non-interactive norm. Students are seated in*

rows facing the teacher, not each other. Rules are instituted that limit interaction: "Keep your hands to yourself," "No talking," "Keep your eyes on your own paper". In contrast, cooperative management involves very different skills. Students are encouraged to interact with teammates because learning occurs through doing and interaction. Among cooperative management techniques the teacher can explore ways to efficiently manage noise, materials, attention, room arrangement, team seating, student energy, and what to do with teams that finish at different rates. Kagan also added: "The stronger our management techniques, the more we will reap the full benefits of cooperative learning. In fact, there are many ways had been developed to do quite cooperative learning as Kagan has stated very clearly; "By having students formulate their own plans to use quiet inner voices (a voice that cannot be heard by a neighboring team), reflect on how well they are using inner voices, hold up quiet teams as a model, assign a Quiet Captain for each team, teach students and have them develop silent cheers, and so on, it is possible to have very quiet but enthusiastic cooperative learning".

2 Class size

Large classes often create challenges to any teacher despite the teaching methodology he or she use because the issue of class control often present in the mind of instructor while he / she delivering the lesson. Thus class size can play a reasonable justification for those who are unwilling to use cooperative learning as Suleiman (2005) believes that the classroom size also might be a problem and could prevent teachers from using group work. So, using cooperative learning might also lead to misbehavior among some learners who view the group arrangement as a chance to discuss irrelevant topics.

In contrast CL advocators do not viewed it as an overwhelming problem since it could be easily overcome as Kagan (1994) argued that the class size does not create any problem for implementing successful cooperative learning lessons. However, the issues of class control are a key to successful cooperative learning. Obviously many teachers might fear to lose control of their classrooms if they allow students interact during learning process. But it should be understood that cooperative classroom management differ vastly from classrooms where whole class method is used. Additionally, the social skill program associated with cooperative learning eliminates many management & discipline problems.

3. The fixed furniture

Many EFL instructors think that the fixed furniture or that bolted to the floor as a problematic area for them to neglect the usage of CL in their classes but this is not quite true. Although is not the ideal classroom for cooperative learning but should be more realistic to overcome this problem in many ways if we seek how our students best learn. Kagan (1994) summaries this clearly teachers can do successful cooperative learning, working around furniture that is bolted to the floor. Therefore, the claim of classroom furniture cannot be rearranged, cannot be accepted once teachers can do successful cooperative learning, working around furniture that is bolted to the floor and could form groups of four to six and do most of the structures

4. The problem of Preparation Time:

Zakaria & Zanagon, (2007) views as they stated that, In order to implement some cooperative learning strategies, it is necessary for teachers to prepare and create materials needed for classes and cooperative teams (. This timely task often increases planning time for the teacher. As stated by the Alliance for Excellent Education (2005), teachers already believe that there is not enough planning time to meet the demands on a day to day basis. The extra time needed to create these materials to implement a cooperative lesson can

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create an overwhelming feeling that adds to an already existing concern. Teachers with packed daily schedules may take exception to having to spend additional personal time on the creation of materials needed to implement with fidelity yet another new strategy in the classroom. This resentment could lead teachers to utilize this lack of time issue as a reason for not implementing cooperative learning strategies in their lessons despite the research supporting its use.

In the field of cooperative learning, one must figure out by differentiate between two types of cooperative learning. The one that classified as classic cooperative learning methods which produce proven positive outcomes but, they are often complex and involve extensive preparation of specialized materials, and the other one that consider to be easy, simple and flexible such like Kagan structural approaches. However, in the busy life of a teacher, these complex methods tend to be relegated, at best, to occasional events. No teacher can spend all day teaching and all night preparing tomorrow's lesson. In contrast, structures involve little preparation or record- keeping and are easily incorporated every day as part of any lesson. With structures, cooperative learning becomes not one more thing to teach, but rather a more engaging and successful way to teach anything (Kagan, 1994, p.17.24).

5. Students' Abilities:

Otha (2001, p.232) views who has stared that students come class with different levels of preparation, exhibit different levels of engagement, and have different understanding of tasks. Individuals have their own dispositions towards language learning. Some such as learner’s propensity to be active and involved or to avoid participation may seem relatively stable. Other learner ‘orientations to classrooms activities may vary from day to day depending on the pressures impacting the learner. And different groupings or pairings of students may also have an effect depending on whether or not a peer interlocutor is engaged on the task. The inactive, uninvolved student who works with a similar peer may behave differently when paired with a highly engaged interlocutor. Some EFL teachers perceive CL as just a group work done completely by students. Hence they doubt regarding students' ability to execute CL successfully, as if the teacher has no role in cooperative learning In other words, they viewed CL methods were students working together with no input or direction from the teacher. Therefore, it would be the blind leading the blind!

Cooperative learning supporters often struggle with such misconceptions held in the belief of some teachers about CL. To correct this misunderstanding, we should differentiate between group work and cooperative learning. Group work often leads some students doing the work while others take a free ride. It also leads to off- task behavior, poor production of information, management and discipline problems. In contrast, cooperative learning has structure, students have role and there should be specific task. This problem has been sorted out by Kagan (1994.p.1.16) in the following: "We are very careful to structure how students work together so they remain focused and equitably share the work. Further, we do not leave to chance the presentation of key concepts and information. We strongly believe in the importance of teacher input and modeling. Most often the cooperative learning structures are designed to process and practice information and skills presented and modeled by the teacher.'

6. Cooperative learning gains

Several studies have focused on the question of which student gain the most from cooperative learning? Low achiever or high achiever? One particularly important question relates to whether cooperative learning is beneficial to students at all levels of prior achievement. It would be possible to argue (see, e.g., Allan, 1991; Robinson,1990) that high achievers could be held back by having to explain material to their low-achieving group mates. However, it would be equally possible to argue that because students who give elaborated explanations typically learn

more than do those who receive them (Webb, 1992), high achievers should be the students who benefit most from cooperative learning because they most frequently give elaborated explanations. Any way this argument concern CL gains has provided an evidence to CL critiques to make it a reasonable justification to oppose the execution of cooperative learning once high achiever students will have stuck to low achiever during cooperative learning activities, as a result, their achievement decrease dramatically and this contradict with (Anwar Hasabala 2020) findings. However, Robinson (1990) findings who had reviewed many cooperative learning studies as he reported that a few found low achievers gained the most. Most, however, found equal benefits for high, average, and low achievers in comparison with their counterparts in control groups.

7. The issue of Reluctant Student

In fact people are different in terms of personality hence a teacher sometimes come across students those refuse to work with others or can't work with others. There are a host of behaviors students can bring to cooperative learning that creates challenges. Some students are rejected, some are hostile, some are bossy, yet others are shy or have special behavioral, cognitive, and or emotional needs. Interestingly, these most frequently encountered social skills problems Kagan (1994) offers ways to deal with each. For instance, for student who refuse to work with others Kagan says: "Our pretty answer is simple: You cannot make a student cooperate, but you certainly can make it attractive for that student to cooperate. And if you make it attractive enough, sooner or later the reluctant and even the openly obstinate student will eventually join in to work with others.

Kagan has suggested many ways to attract reluctant and resistant student to join cooperative learning. A teacher might give the choice between working alone or in groups and provide tasks that can be finished much more quickly and accurately in groups, and couple that with an attractive activity that can be done only when the task is done. Provide encouraging gambits for teammates to use such like, "We could really use your help." or " We really appreciate your contribution " A teacher begin with tasks well within the capacity of the hesitant student and choose a task that align with a special interest or ability of the reluctant student.

Sellers (2005), findings who noted that, the learners showed a strong sense of group, reduced anxiety, and enhanced motivation after receiving second language instruction through cooperative learning.

8. College Support for CL implementation

Hassard (1990) who noted that, the integration of cooperative learning techniques into college-level classrooms does require a reevaluation of the faculty member's role. Basically, power is shifted from the authority figure of the instructor to the students themselves who then become actively involved in their own learning and in the learning processes of their peers. In informal terms the teacher becomes not the "sage on the stage," but "the guide on the side." As Finkel and Monk (1983) point out, this shift becomes more viable if teachers think in terms of teaching functions rather than in terms of fixed roles. Faculty actively involved with group learning now functions as coaches and monitors, as well as experts.

Zakaria & Zanagon, (2007) views as they stated that, In order to implement some cooperative learning strategies, it is necessary for teachers to prepare and create materials needed for classes and cooperative teams. The preparation needs extra time and money which is the main obstacle due to the lack & shortage of budget of the institute. Thus instructors unwilling to prepare materials that needed for CL execution.

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9. The issue of correction & Feedback

Some teachers claim that during a lesson if they call on a student, they hear that student's answer**.** Then they can check for understanding and offer correction if necessary but, if students are all talking in pairs or teams at once, how can they check for understanding and offer corrective feedback? Won't wrong answers be shared?

In traditional whole class method (lecture), the students most likely to have misconceptions are most likely to leave class with their misconceptions uncorrected. Kagan has illustrated this very clear in two examples:

Example 1: The teacher asks a question. Students who think they know the answer raise their hands to be called on. They answer and the teacher offers correction if necessary. In this common scenario, who do not raise their hands and do not receive correction? It is the students who are most likely to need help, who are least likely to verbalize their thinking. Thus, those who most need it are least likely to receive corrective feedback!

Example 2: A teacher presents a skill or information, then asks, “Does anyone have any questions?” For fear of embarrassment or for lack of engagement, the students who most need to ask questions are those least likely to ask. Those without understanding or with misconceptions leave class without receiving clarification and without having their misconceptions corrected.

In cooperative learning students interacting in pairs and the teacher give each partner a minute to verbalize, then he walk and listen in to a number of pairs, hearing the ideas of a much more representative sample of his class. So he hears misconceptions that would never verbalize in a traditional classroom. Then he may choose to give immediate feedback or to the whole class after pair interaction. Kagan has summarized this in the following: "In either case, we have a more realistic assessment of the understanding level of our students. Because all students are verbalizing their thinking, not just the high achievers, those most in need of a correction opportunity are most likely to receive the help, either from their partner or from the teacher.

Finally, it should be understood that cooperative learning is a wonderful learning device but not a measuring device. And if it has to be use for evaluation and assessment, it should be used with caution. (Johnson, 1994)

10. The pressure to cover the curriculum:

This is the most important factor which influences EFL university instructors not to use cooperative learning in their classrooms. So they often argue; how can they cover the curriculum if they allow time for student discussions, team building, class building or even silly sport energizers? Answers to these inquiries simply provided by Kagan in his book (Kagan Cooperative learning). “If we want to cover as much curriculum as possible, we need to stand in front of our class, talk fast, and allow no interruptions, student questions or student discussion. We will cover the most curriculums possible that way, but students will understand, enjoy, and retain little ”. However, nobody will deny covering the curriculum is a noble goal, but this goal can be achieved` only if , it includes teaching with understanding and appreciation. In this respect, Kagan added: ' If we are to provide our students with skills for success, we must imbue a love of learning. If they are to be successful, our students must become lifelong learners. If they get 100% on our tests, but hate the subject matter and do not leave our class hungry to learn more, we have failed them! The class building, team building, and energizers create a positive class climate conducive to that fundamental goal: creating a love of learning."

Conclusion

Research and studies investigate the factors that influence teachers' decision whether or not to use CL will pave the way for implementing cooperative learning in EFL classrooms. In addition research needs to take a socio-cultural approach to find out how EFL students perceive CL?

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